

(12) **UK Patent Application** (19) **GB** (11) **2 184 029** (13) **A**

(43) Application published 17 Jun 1987

(21) Application No **8629766**

(22) Date of filing **12 Dec 1986**

(30) Priority data
(31) **8530663** (32) **12 Dec 1985** (33) **GB**

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(51) INT CL⁴
A63F 9/22 G09B 7/077

(52) Domestic classification (Edition I):
A6H 10X27 16

(56) Documents cited
None

(58) Field of search
A6H
Selected US specifications from IPC sub-class A63F

(54) **Amusement or skill games with prizes machines**

(57) An amusement or skill games with prizes machine has means for registering a score or its equivalent and comparing it with that registered in a previous play. If that is bettered the machine issues a token, such as a ticket, with details recorded on it. At the end of a sequence, the player with the best performance can redeem a prize through his token, possibly directly through the machine. The prize fund may increment throughout the sequence, and the machine can display target and actual performances. In an alternative a central computer may send questions to a plurality of satellite computers. Players at the satellites make their responses and the central computer ranks the responses by speed of correct response.

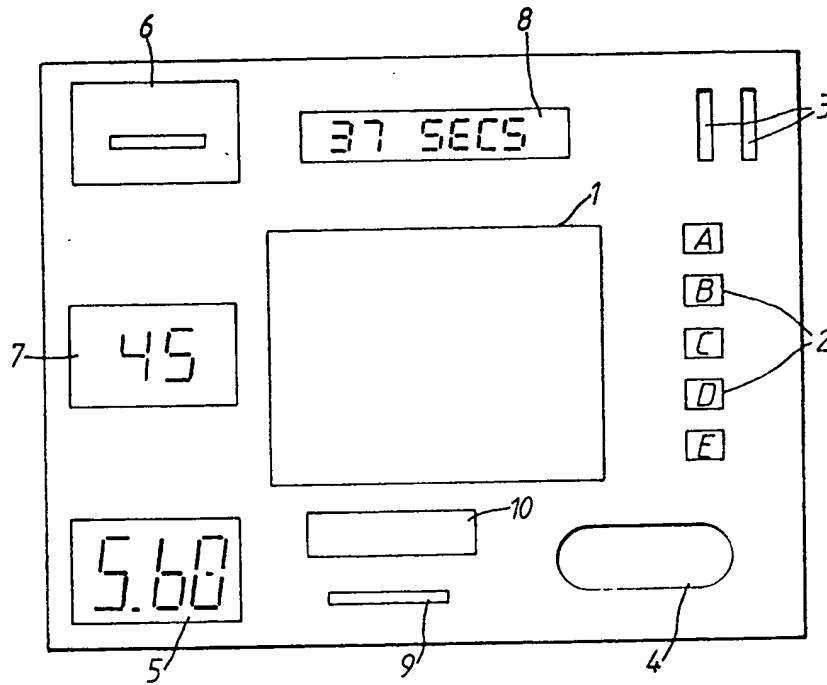
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SPECIFICATION

Improvements relating to amusement or skill games with prizes machines

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This invention relates to amusement or skill games with prizes. It can be applied to a wide variety of such machines, but they will all have in common some goal which the player has to achieve to win.

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While winning is satisfying, and a modest prize awarded as a result even more so, it is still more gratifying not only to "beat the machine" but also other players. While there are machines which two players can operate in opposition to each other, the scope for any more to be involved has been severely restricted.

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It is the aim of this invention to enable such multi-player involvement, and to provide a substantial prize to the one with the best performance.

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According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided an amusement or skill game with prizes machine in which a successful play is registered by the machine and compared with the previous best performance, and if said play betters said performance, the machine issues a recognition thereof.

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This recognition may be in the form of a receipt or ticket with data relating to the performance. The machine may have means whereby the player can enter personal details, and this also can be recorded on any receipt or ticket, as well as being retainable by the machine. At the end of a period, the person holding the last issued receipt or ticket, representing the best performance, would be awarded a substantial prize.

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Success may be measured in various ways according to the nature of the machine. For example, with a quiz machine, where answers have to be given to a succession of questions, the deciding factor can be the time in which the questions are answered correctly. Other games may have a points system, a certain number being awarded for each objective achieved, and the total points within a certain time or number of operations being the deciding factor.

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The machine would not be operated indefinitely in the same mode, since once a really good performance had been achieved, it would become virtually impossible to improve upon it and player interest would be lost. Preferably, therefore, the machine will be set to operate for a given period or sequence of plays, at the end of which the last recognition would be redeemable for a prize. The machine

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will be returned to an initial state in which previous best performances are discounted in further plays.

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At the end of each such period or sequence recognition of other performances, such as second and third best, may also be redeema-

ble for subsidiary prizes.

The machine could be arranged to record the best ever performance and, if that is exceeded in a subsequent period or sequence of games, the machine will issue a special recognition of such an achievement.

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Preferably, the available prize will be arranged to increment over a period or sequence in relation to the number of times the machine is played. Thus, the more it is used, the higher the ultimate prize.

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While the prizes may be redeemable through the proprietor of the machine, for example, this operation could be automated. The machine could be adapted to retain the record of the best performance after the end of the related period or sequence, to recognise on subsequent presentation the receipt or ticket issued for that performance, and to pay out the prize due.

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According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a plurality of skill or amusement-with-prizes machines each having electronic operation and/or control and all being linked to a central computer, the latter being programmed to issue challenges to the players of the machines, to correlate the various responses thereto, and to determine the best performance.

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Preferably, the result of such determination will be relayed back to the machine for indication to the players. The computer may also be programmed to determine the relative merit of responses from the machines and to relay back to them an order of merit for indication to the players.

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The machines may be adapted to be played by teams of players with duplicated controls. The first response by any member of the team through his controls may be accepted as a response by the central computer, or different machines may have computer means to assess different responses from members of the team and present a consensus of such responses as a single response to the central computer.

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For a better understanding of the invention one embodiment will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawing, in which the single figure is a face view of the display panel of an amusement machine.

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The precise nature of the machine in the way it offers amusement or a challenge to a player is not material. It can take many different forms, but for convenience it will be assumed that it is a quiz machine in which a question and a group of possible answers are projected on a screen 1 and the player can answer by pressing one of a corresponding group of answer buttons 2. Such a machine is described in our co-pending application No. 8527431. The machine is enabled by coins or tokens inserted in slots 3.

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Such machines may be expected to give a

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prize if played successfully, and there is shown an outlet 4 through which a prize may be delivered. However, this is an optional feature and subsidiary to the main prize awarding system to be described below.

Also visible on the face of the machine is an indicator 5. This shows the main prize available, not through outlet 4 as a result of a one-off play, but from a set number or sequence of games. It may be a fixed figure constant for the life of the machine, a fixed figure set for each period by the proprietor, or preferably an incremental figure starting at a base set by the proprietor at the beginning of the period or sequence, say £5, and increasing by a smaller amount for each £1 put into the machine. Thus, if this smaller amount were 10p, and games were played to the value of £5, then the available prize would have increased to £5.50. At the end of the period or sequence, the machine will be reset, not necessarily to the original base figure. This re-setting may be done by the proprietor, who could determine each period or sequence arbitrarily, or automatically by the machine which would have an internal clock or counter to exercise control. In any event, manual reset will preferably be provided, if only as an option, since an outstanding performance early in a period or sequence would be a discouragement to later players, as will be apparent.

The machine is also equipped with a ticket or receipt issuing device 6. When someone plays the machine and wins, for example by answering all the questions, or a sufficient proportion of them, within a time limit indicated by a clock 7, there may be a small monetary prize at the outlet 4, but there will more importantly be a ticket or receipt issued from the device 6. This will have recorded on it the performance achieved, for example the time taken to answer all the questions. When the machine is first played at the beginning of a period, the first winning time will also be displayed in a window 8. The player will take the ticket and keep it until the end of the period. Succeeding players will aim not only to answer all the questions, but also to beat the time standing in the Window 8. If this time is beaten, then the device 8 will issue another receipt or ticket, which that player retains, and the new record time will be shown in the window 8.

At the end of a period or sequence the proprietor will call for the presentation of the last ticket issued, which will have won the player concerned the amount standing in the display 5. Alternatively, the prize could be the amount standing in the display when the ticket was issued, this being recorded on the ticket.

There could be smaller, consolation prizes for second and third places.

It would be possible for the machine to issue a ticket or receipt to every player who attains a certain level of performance, such as

answering all the questions within a time limit, even though that might not be the best. The winning one would still be identifiable by the information recorded on it.

It is envisaged that a typical period might be one week, and that the machine would be set up in a pub or club bar, or in an arcade. It will therefore happen quite frequently that the winning player will not be present when the period comes to an end and the prize is declared. Rather than wait for him to turn up again, it is desirable that there should be some record on the premises or the machine of each player who has been issued with a ticket. This may be done by each winner taking his ticket to the proprietor and having his details recorded against a code number corresponding to that on the ticket. However, a more sophisticated way could be provided by the machine itself. Before a ticket is issued to a winner, the latter may be invited, by a display on the screen, for example, or by a recorded audio message, to record his name and address, or telephone number or other identifying information, by using a keyboard. The ticket would then be issued with this punched or otherwise recorded on it, and the machine would retain the corresponding information on a counterfoil, or on tape or disc, for example. Thus the proprietor would be able to determine who had won and be able to contact him. A winner not claiming his prize within a certain time limit might forfeit it, and it would then go to the runner-up.

This personal information can also be made the subject of a display, for example by having an enlarged window 8 to show not only the current winning time but also the name of the person who had achieved it.

An alternative approach to redeeming a prize is indicated by the slot 9 and window 10. At the end of a period or sequence, the machine retains a record of the winning performance and indicates it in the window 10. The player with the ticket or receipt related to this performance, returning at any time within a given limit (for example within the next period or sequence), can enter that ticket or receipt in the slot 9. It will be read and checked by the machine and, if the claim is justified, the appropriate pay-out will be made via the outlet 4.

The machine described has been assumed to stand alone. In addition, it is proposed that a number of such machines at different locations should be used together in competitive play between different pubs, say. They would all be linked to a central computer, generally by modems and telephone lines. At a set time, the computer would start, projecting questions to all the on-line machines (the same question at each), and the answers would be fed back to the computer. This would determine which machine had the correct answer first and so on. The game would

progress and respective scores would be totted up in the central computer and be instantly relayed to the machines. Each one might have only its own individual score, but preferably those of the others would also be made known, and a continuously up-dated "league table" could be displayed on each machine.

- To extend this concept further, instead of having just one set of buttons 2 which one person might be delegated to operate, where teams are playing each other, each member might have his own answering unit with a set of buttons. All in the same team could share the screen 1. The answer transmitted to the central computer might either be the first one given by any member of the team or, preferably, a consensus of the collective answers, with the majority vote being determined by a local computer and transmitted to the central one.

CLAIMS

1. An amusement or skill game with prizes machine in which a successful play is registered by the machine and compared with the previous best performance, and if said play betters said performance, the machine issues a recognition thereof.
2. A machine as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said recognition is a receipt or ticket with data relating to the performance.
3. A machine as claimed in Claim 2, wherein means are provided for the player to enter personal details which are recorded on any receipt or ticket.
4. A machine as claimed in Claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the machine has indicator means showing the prize available to the best performer.
5. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the machine is settable to operate for a given period or sequence of plays, at the end of which the last recognition is redeemable for a prize and the machine is returned to an initial state in which previous best performances are discounted in further plays.
6. A machine as claimed in Claim 5, wherein at the end of a period or sequence recognition of other performances are redeemable for subsidiary prizes.
7. A machine as claimed in Claim 5 or 6, with the modification that the machine records the best ever performance and, if that is exceeded in a subsequent period or sequence of games, the machine issues a special recognition thereof.
8. A machine as claimed in Claim 5, 6 or 7, wherein the available prize is arranged to increment over the period or sequence in relation to the number of times the machine is played.
9. A machine as claimed in any one of Claims 5 to 8 as appendent to Claim 2,

wherein the machine is adapted to retain a record of the best performance after the end of the related period or sequence, and to recognise on subsequent presentation the receipt or ticket issued for that performance and to pay out the prize due.

10. A plurality of skill or amusement-with prizes machines each having electronic operation and/or control and all being linked to a central computer, the latter being programmed to issue challenges to the players of the machines, to correlate the various responses thereto, and to determine the best performance.

11. A computer/machine assembly as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the result of such determination is relayed back to said machines for indication to the players thereof.

12. A computer/machine assembly as claimed in Claim 11, wherein the computer is programmed to determine the relative merits of responses from the machines and to relay back to said machines an order of merit for indication to the players.

13. A computer/machine assembly as claimed in Claims 10, 11 or 12, wherein the machines are adapted to be played by teams of players, with duplicated controls.

14. A computer/machine assembly as claimed in Claim 13, wherein the first responses by any member of a team through his controls is accepted as the response by the central computer.

15. A computer/machine assembly as claimed in Claim 13, wherein each machine has computer means to assess different responses from members of the team and present a consensus of such responses as a single response to said central computer.

Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office
by Burgess & Son (Abingdon) Ltd, Dd 8991685, 1987.
Published at The Patent Office, 25 Southampton Buildings,
London, WC2A 1AY, from which copies may be obtained.